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bath or wash is necessary to remove the impurity caused by the act. Non-observance of these rules will have a polluting effect; and according to the nature and degree of pollution purificatory rites will have to be undertaken.

Belief in ghosts and spirits is universal. They are feared and propitiated. Strange mystical power pervading certain objects is recognized, and fetishes and amulets are eagerly sought. Witchcraft is often suspected, and three or four people in the community are believed to possess magical powers.

Clearly, Hinduism as it is practised in the village is not the Hinduism of the classical philosophical systems of India, for it possesses neither the metaphysical heights nor the abstract content of the latter. It is a religion of fasts, feasts and festivals, in which prescribed rituals cover all the major crises of life. Worship and propitiation of gods and spirits follow the annual round of festivals and the ritual of the human life-cycle. Disease and difficulty may also necessitate invoking assistance from these sources.

In early childhood religious instruction through legendary tales and anecdotes exercises its influence on the developing mind of the child in whose thoughts and world of fancy these ideas linger on. Youth brings in its wake a more worldly and materialistic outlook towards life and its pleasures. Thoughts are turned to religion when the evening of life approaches, partly to postpone the final moment of departure as long as it could be, and partly to ensure the future lying beyond the point of death. Analysis of life-histories reveals that spiritualism cannot be said to be the keynote in the life of the community; far from it the religion appears to be a practical one. It strengthens and fortifies the individual and the group in situations where technical competence and practical intelligence are of no avail, and at the same time acts as a bond of cohesion for maintaining the structural unity of the society.

2. BELIEF: GODS AND DEITIES

The Muslims believe in one God, and follow the way of life laid down for them by their Prophet. They all belong to the Sunni division, and as such differ from the Shias and other splinter divisions of Islam in respect of the interpretation of their holy book as well as in several details of belief, ritual and ceremonial. Almost all the Muslims of Shamirpet have been converted to Islam from Hinduism in the course of the last four or five generations.

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779 Muslim State, the Hindus had their revenge by pouring scorn
798 openly on Muslim religion and society. It was now the turn of the Muslims to observe silence, and tolerate humiliation and insults. At the time of our investigations, however, most of these passions had subsided, and no significant tensions were observed. As groups both Hindus and Muslims regard themselves as superior
[564] in point of religion. From the socio-economic point of view the Muslims can be regarded as an exclusive caste whose social standing is roughly equal to that of the agricultural castes.

564 Caste as a factor of social differentiation is more significant. It has been pointed out that in its structure, the caste system has definitely a hierarchical character. Between the highest and the lowest castes, there are several intermediate levels. The social status of a person is largely determined by his caste. The mere fact of birth in a particular caste gives a good initial start to some and puts obstacles in the way of others. In a subsequent chapter I propose to examine some of the stereotypes current in the village community regarding the qualities and characteristics of different castes; but notwithstanding these the relative position of the different castes in the village community is determined by the traditional scale.

554 Religion and caste are more or less fixed and permanent factors. While change of faith is possible, and under certain circumstances a person can even descend from one of the higher castes to the lowest, such changes are very rare. At any rate no one takes recourse to them to bring about a change in his social status.
[771] The only case of change of faith recorded by us in the village is that of the present headmaster of the school who was a Brahmin to begin with, but later embraced Islam. No case of change of caste came to our notice.

556 In a predominantly agricultural society it is natural to expect that possession of land and cattle would contribute greatly to an individual's social status. Birth into a family of landowners ensures that a person will grow up to be a respected member of the village community. Acquisition of land would very materially affect the social position even of a person of humble birth, and if he does not behave tactlessly it would greatly enhance his prestige. An untouchable Mala peasant is now counted among the influential cultivators of the village and is given a place of honour in its counsels. He is still an untouchable and would continue to remain

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and then ask him to do a thing, a Madiga will never refuse. Ask him to do something in soft words and he will have a thousand excuses ready.'

Although Shamirpet has maintained, even in the worst years of communal tension, a fairly honourable record of communal harmony and the relations between the Hindu and the Muslim sections of the village population have been cordial in every sense, the two communities have some generalized notions about the inherent qualities and attributes of each other. The Hindus will say, 'The untouchables are impure, but Muslims are poisonous. If you touch a Madiga you may have to sever only the finger with which you touched him, but if you touch a Muslim you will have to cut off the arm itself.' 'The Muslims are good only in two things —they eat and copulate like beasts. Who else except a Muslim would ever think of going to bed with his uncle's daughter, who is next only to his real sister.' The Muslims are regarded as showy and ostentatious. 'A Muslim will eat stale rice inside his house, but when coming out he will apply some clarified butter to his lips. Then he will belch loudly and say, "How much fried rice and meat have I eaten to-day".' With regard to conversion to Islam the Hindus often say, 'A Hindu untouchable of yesterday becomes a Muslim to-day; and to-morrow he will start proclaiming that his forefathers lived in Arabia!' The Muslims, having for generations prided themselves as the ruling race of Hyderabad, tend to look down upon the Hindus, and make fun of their numerous gods and superstitious beliefs. On the whole the Muslims regard the other community as 'cowardly and mean'. But the recent changes in the political fortunes of the State, resulting in the end of Muslim rule, have had a sobering effect on the Muslims, and now they do not take the offensive against their Hindu neighbours, as some of them very commonly did in the period preceding the Police Action of 1948.

I have pointed out earlier that most of these stereotypes find expression in jest and banter, and occasionally in outbursts of anger. While each caste seeks to proclaim and prove its own superiority in some respect it invariably holds some generalized notions, such as those described above, about the inherent qualities of the other castes. It is believed that there can be individual exceptions to the rule, but regarding the castes themselves these stereotypes are valid. However, very few of these notions influence